

## Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 678

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, BG, IN

SUBJECT: INDIAN MEDIA COVERAGE ON THE BANGLADESH SITUATION

BEGIN SUMMARY: FOR THE THIRD CONSECUTIVE DAY, INDIAN MEDIA CONTINUED TO BE DOMINATED BY EXTENSIVE NEWS COVERAGE ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN BANGLADESH. HOWEVER, THE EVENT GENERATED SCATTERED AND CAUTIOUS EDITORIAL COMMENT. THE EXISTING GOI PRESS CENSORSHIP REGULATIONS PROHIBIT PUBLICATION OF MATERIAL "WHICH IS LIKELY TO AFFECT" INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES. A LEADING NEWSPAPER VOICED NEW DELHI'S "CONCERN "OVER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SUBCONTINENT. END SUMMARY.

1. NEWSPAPERS APPEARING AUGUST 16 BANNERED MUJIB'S ASSASSINATION IN ARMY TAKE-OVER. THE TIMES OF INDIA RAN A TYPICAL EIGHT-COLUMN HEADLINE: "MUJIB ASSASSINATED IN ARMY COUP." MULTI-DECK HEADLINES ALSO PROCLAIMED: (1) PM MANSOOR ALI KILLED (2) MARTIAL LAW IMPOSED, AND (3) BANGLADESH DECLARED ISLAMIC REPUBLIC (SOURCE IDENTIFIED EAS THE AP). STORIES QUOTED THE UNITED NEWS OF INDIA THAT THE NEW PRESIDENT MUSHTAQUE AHMED IS PRO-PAKISTAN. OTHER RELATED NEWS TREATMENT INCLUDED BRIEF REPORTS THAT THE STATE DEPARTMENT WAS "THE FIRST TO ANNOUNCE THE NEWS" OF THE COUP, AND PINDI RECOGNIZED THE

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NEW REGIME AND RUSHED AID TO DACCA. PAERS ALSO CARRIED

LONG OBITS, PRAISING MUJIB AS "A MAN OF INDOMITABLE COURAGE" WHO "CREATED A MODERN NATION."

2. THE FOCUS OF NEWS COVERAGE AUGUST 18 WAS MUJIB'S BURIAL WITH "FULL HONORS" AND THE GOI "CAREFULLY STUDYING" THE REPORTS -- TWO LEAD STORIES IN MOST LEADING PAPERS. BASED ON INDIAN NEWS AGENCIES (UNITED NEWS OF INDIA AND PRESS TRUST OF INDIA) SOURCES, ACCOUNTS QUOTED NEW PRESIDENT AHMED" EXPRESSING SATISFACTION AT THE OVERALL SITUATION" AND VETERAN LEADER BHASANI WELCOMING THE CHANGE AS "HISTORIC."

3. REPORTAGE ON THE GOI REACTION QUOTED "A SPOKESMAN" OF THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS SAYING THAT INDIA COULD NOT REMAIN UNAFFECTED BY THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN A NEIGHBOURING COUNTRY, "BUT THEY ARE INTERNAL MATTERS OF BANGLADESH." THE SPOKESMAN ADDED THAT THE GOI WAS "CAREFULLY STUDYING" THE REPORTS AND "WATCHING THE DEVELOPMENTS." HE ALSO EXPRESSED INDIA'S "GREAT SHOCK" OVER REPORTS OF KILLING OF POLITICAL LEADERS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

4. TODAY'S PAPERS CONCENTRATED ON THE "SPONTANEOUS FIGHTING" (SOURCE: AFP, QUOTING IRANIAN TV) BETWEEN SUPPORTERS OF THE ASSASSINATED LEADER AND THE NEW AUTHORITIES. THE TIMES OF INDIA AND PRO-MOSCOW PATRIOT ACCORDED THE NEWS LEAD SPOT. THE STATESMAN FRONT-PAGED AFP REPORT, "USA READY TO GRANT RECOGNITION." OTHER RELATED NEWS STORIES STRESSED THAT LIFE IS RETURNING TO NORMAL IN THE COUNTRY; CURFEW HAS BEEN LIFTED; PM MANSUR ALI IS ALIVE; AND "PINDI-DACCA TALKS ON TIES LIKELY SOON" (ISLAMABAD-DATED LINED REUTERS STORY BASED ON "DIPLOMATIC SOURCES").

5. THERE WAS SCATTERED COMMENT IN TODAY'S PAPERS. IN A LEAD EDITORIAL, "COUP IN BANGLADESH," THE INDIAN EXPRESS HELD THAT THE TAKE-OVER "BRINGS ABOUT A MAJOR CHANGE IN THE COUNTRY" THE "THE ARMY APPEARS TO BE THE PRINCIPAL FACTOR IN THE TAKE-OVER." IT ADDED: "FIRST REPORTS DO NOT INDICATE ANY SIGN OF POPULAR RESISTANCE TO THE

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CHANGED SITUATION. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SURPRISING HAD IT BEEN OTHERWISE." THE EDITORIAL BLAMED MUJIB FOR "DISMANTLING THE PLURAL BASE OF THE CONSTITUTION AND GATHERING ALL THE THREADS OF POWER IN HIS OWN HANDS" AND FOR LACKING "FIRM GRIP ON THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES." BUT "HE GAVE HIS PEOPLE DIGNITY AND SELF-ASSURANCE AND WIELDED THEM INTO A NATION AGAINST STAGGERING ODDS."

6. THE PAPER RAN ON PAGE ONE ITS SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT, F. CHAKRAVARTY'S NEW DELHI-DATELINED DISPATCH, "EXTREMISTS HAD JOINED HANDS TO OPPOSE MUJIB." HE COMMENTED: " PERHAPS THE ACTIONS AND POLICES OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT IN DACCA WILL IN COURSE OF TIME REVEAL ITS CHARACTER AND SOME OF THE REASONS FOR THIS DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENT." IN FURTHER COMMENT, THE CORRESPONDENT HIGHLIGHTED THAT BY DECLARING A STATE OF NATIONAL EMERGENCY AND INTRODUCING ONE-PARTY RULE, MUJIB "SEEMED TO HAVE MOVED FURTHER AWAY FROM THE PEOPLE, " ADDING: " A MAJOR FACTOR, WHICH EVENTUALLY PROVED TO THE MOST SERIOUS AND POTENT, THAT SHEIKH MUJIB APPARENTLY OVERLOOKED WAS THE ARMED FORCES OF THE COUNTRY."

7. THE HINDUSTAN TIMES LEAD EDITORIAL, "BANGLADESH TRAGEDY," OBSERVED: " INDIA WILL NATURALLY BE CONCERNED OVER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SUB-CONTINENT. ANY UNREST AND INSTABILITY COULD HAVE REPERCUSSIONS THAT WOULD NOT LEAVE THIS COUNTRY UNAFFECTED. IT WOULD AGGRAVATE TENSIONS SHOULD ANY EXTERNAL POWER ATTEMPT TO EXPLOIT MANNER." IT CONCLUDED BY SAYING: " INDIA CAN ONLY WATCH WITH SYMPATHY EVEN WHILE MAINTAINING VIGILANCE."SAXBE

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